

# MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

## Success Stories from the Field

### **Cream of the West LLC**

Montana Manufacturing Extension Center

#### **Cream of the West, LLC Sprouts Sales and Markets With MMEC's Eureka! Winning Ways**

##### **Client Profile:**

Cream of the West LLC mills, blends and roasts whole-grain hot breakfast cereals using Montana's grain. The 95-year-old company originated in Billings, Montana and then relocated to Harlowton, Montana. Cream of the West products are sold on store shelves in most Montana communities as well as in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, California and Wyoming. The company produces about 75,000 boxes of 7-Grain and Wheat cereal each year. Cream of the West employs 6 people

##### **Situation:**

Finding ideas for new products and reaching new markets posed a challenge for Cream of the West. When a preview presentation about profitable growth for small companies was offered using Montana Manufacturing Extension Center's (MMEC), a NIST MEP network affiliate, Eureka! Winning Ways program, the company's owner, Alicia Moe, recognized a real opportunity to jumpstart more growth.

##### **Solution:**

MMEC's partnership with the Montana Department of Agriculture enabled Cream of the West to qualify for a grant to offset the cost of the development project. At the session, the company came up with 70 ideas for growth and spent time defining the ideas more fully using focused techniques. Cream of the Crop came away with two key ideas that would leverage company assets and help meet the owner's desire to remain committed to sustainable agriculture and provide jobs for the local community. An MMEC growth coach worked with the company's team over several months in a 'Trailblazer' process to gather data and develop the action items to get growing. The top idea to target a new customer group with an existing product, while incurring little additional expense, was to focus promotion of its Montana Crunch healthy, whole-grain snack product in the fund raiser market.

The project is opening unexpected doors and helping the company increase sales and develop new markets for branded and private label crunch. The effort immediately bore fruit as a fund raiser for Future Farmers of America (FFA). The company received bonus exposure when the product was taken to the National FFA Convention to represent Montana. The product was also private labeled for several local business promotions. The fund raiser idea opened the door to sales in a pilot school fund raiser program 'From Farms to Schools.' This program enables schools to raise money while supporting local food producers whose products are deemed to be healthy. Montana Crunch is a good fit. The program goal is to support local farmers/food companies, keeping more money circulating in the local economy, and to help connect kids/families to the local sources of their foods. This important connection stems from recent research indicating programs that help to connect children to the source of their food can result in positive changes in eating behavior.

Another door opened to more sales with the Montana Food Bank Network's 'backpack program,' providing nutritious, healthy food to hungry children to take home on weekends and school holidays. Cream of the West will provide it with 9,500 pounds of Montana Crunch for the 2009-2010 school year.

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Growth will not stop there. The second top Eureka! Winning Ways growth idea, an evolving concept called the 'Grain Bin®,' will soon be launched as part of the company's upgraded Web site. The Grain Bin will offer wholesome bulk grains and flours that appeal to a niche market.

#### **Results:**

- \* Increased sales by \$20,000.
- \* Created 1 job.
- \* Achieved a more competitive and profitable position.

#### **Testimonial:**

"The MMEC growth services have opened many doors for us and really helped us focus on dramatic difference in what we do."

Alicia Moe, Owner & General Manager